

Han Fa: The Sweating (diaphoretic) Method

By Cheng Guopeng Scholar, Qing Dynasty

Cheng Guopeng is one of the seminal scholar-physicians of the early Qing dynasty.

Sweating means: dispersing. The classic states: “If the pernicious qi lodges within the skin/hair layer, sweat it out.” And another passage points out: “If the body turns burning hot, sweat will pour out and the condition will naturally be alleviated.” However, in daily practice we encounter many situations where the sweating method has not been used or used inappropriately. For instance, some patients should be sweated and are not sweated. Others should not be sweated but are sweated. Others should be sweated yet cannot be sweated and are nevertheless forcefully sweated. Others again should be sweated yet cannot be sweated, but on the other hand cannot not be sweated, and are thus inappropriately prevented from finding a proper way to sweat. And finally, others should be sweated, yet the sweating method is not directed at the appropriate meridian, since some doctors do not differentiate between diaphoretic herbs and only know how to make the patient sweat without knowing anything about the necessity and principles of astringing. It is precisely these scenarios that we have to keep in mind when we are dealing with sweating matters. And what exactly, do I mean by that?

When a wind cold syndrome first afflicts a person, there is the typical headache, fever, and aversion to cold; the nose is stuffy, the voice raspy, and the body painful. This is a clear-cut case where the disease lodges in the skin/hair layer, and this condition should definitely be treated by employing the sweating method. If the person is not sweated in due time or not appropriately sweated, the pores will become

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jammed, the intricate connection between the nutritive (ying) and protective (wei) qi layers will shut down, and the pernicious influence will enter the body deeper and progress from layer to layer. This is what I refer to as cases that should be sweated but are not sweated.

There are, however, several situations where the patient also suffers from headache and fever, just like in the case of a wind cold, but the symptoms arise for different reasons, therefore requiring different treatment methods:

There are those with headache and fever that appear exhausted and without physical strength, the nose is not stuffed, the voice is not raspy, and there is a weak and deficient pulse. This must be interpreted as an internal injury of Original Qi.

Or there are those sex maniacs who have exhausted their yin essence, manifesting in symptoms of internal heat and afternoon fevers; their pulse is usually fine and rapid and without force.

Or there are those suffering from food injury that complain about a stuffy sensation in the chest and diaphragm regions, regurgitation of acid, and belching of foul odors. They usually experience tidal fevers in the afternoon and exhibit a tight pulse in the first position.

Or there are those with a heavy head and cold extremities caused by cold phlegm, those with internal dampness causing swelling in the lower extremities, those with internal and external

abscesses, those with coagulation of stagnating blood, those with wind-heat and damp-heat disorders, and those with spontaneous sweating caused by a summer heat stroke. All of these patients experience alternating chills and fevers, very similar to an externally contracted wind cold syndrome but actually of quite a different nature. If these kinds of patients are mistakenly sweated, all kinds of secondary symptoms will emerge! This is what I meant by sweating people that ought not be sweated.

to the right or below or above the navel, they cannot be sweated. The classic states: “If there is qi movement to the right, we cannot sweat; if sweated, the patient will start bleeding and become thirsty, grow restless, and vomit as soon as s/he drinks fluids; if there is qi movement to the left, the patient cannot be sweated; if sweated, s/he will turn dizzy and sweat incessantly, and the muscles and tendons will shiver and shake. If there is qi movement above, we cannot sweat; otherwise the qi will

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Also, some patients belong to the category of external affliction and should be sweated, but since there is qi movement to the left or

rush upwards and attack the heart. If there is qi movement below, we cannot sweat, otherwise there will not be any sweat at all, and the patient